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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation and for that purpose we shall sit in a comfortable and relaxed position. At the same time, we should take some time to cultivate a proper attitude in our mind, setting the motivation for meditation. The combination of having a relaxed physical posture and a good mental attitude seems to really make meditation worthwhile.

The relevance of having a relaxed physical posture, a calm mental state and a good attitude can be seen in the relationship that we have with our body and mind. Our general wellbeing depends on both our physical and mental wellbeing. To experience happiness, we need to have the right combination, or balance, of physical and mental wellbeing.

If we were to only pay attention to having a relaxed physical posture and not to our mental state, we would notice that, even if we were relaxed physically, we could still experience mental unrest. Although we might be fine and relaxed physically, if the mind is feeling uncomfortable and ill-at-ease, it is because we have not paid attention to our mental state.

On the other hand, for someone who has regularly paid attention to their mental well being – attempting to generate a positive mental outlook and to maintain that mental focus and calmness – as a natural consequence, through familiarity, their mind will develop to the point where it can remain tranquil and undisturbed in every situation. Even with our limited experience, we might notice that, having engaged in some meditation practice, our mind can still be quite calm in the face of some chaotic situation going on externally. This shows that the main contributing factor to our general wellbeing, peace and happiness is really our mental development.

We can see the difference between someone who has neglected developing their mind – and whose mind could be quite agitated even if their physical body is relaxed – and someone who has been developing their mind. For the latter, even if their physical body is not relaxed or they are in a disturbing situation, their mind can still remain tranquil and peaceful.

It is through these differences that we can come to understand how our wellbeing is primarily related to developing our mental state rather than just the physical body.

The development of the mind is considered to be extremely important. As mentioned earlier, if our wellbeing is primarily related to the development of a positive state of mind, a positive attitude, then developing such an attitude is very important. Developing a positive attitude basically means developing a kind attitude, based on concern for others. We need to develop this to its fullest capacity, taking a kind attitude in whatever we do, with whomever we associate, and maintaining that kind attitude in our personal practice and in helping others. That unflinching kind attitude

will ensure that our mind remains positive and this will contribute to the wellbeing and calmness of our mind.

We can see that developing the mind and maintaining the happiness of the mind seems to be the best possession and the best form of wealth that we could have. This is something that I would consider as the highest wealth, anyway – but you may have a different idea!

When I talk about the happiness of the mind as being the best wealth, I am referring to internal wealth, in contrast to external wealth. External wealth relates to physical resources – money, status and so forth – whereas internal wealth is what I would consider as happiness of the mind.

We can definitely see examples of individuals who may not have much external wealth, who live with meagre necessities to sustain themselves, yet maintain a very happy frame of mind. They seem to be really joyful and quite content. Yet there are those who may have a lot of external wealth, who are doing well financially in business and whose external circumstances are very good, but who lack inner wealth, in the form of real joy and happiness in their mind. They can appear to be quite agitated and disturbed. So we can definitely see the difference between the value of internal wealth, which is the happiness of the mind, versus mere external wealth.

We definitely need external wealth in the form of resources that sustain our physical wellbeing. To a certain degree, external wealth does contribute to our wellbeing and thus to our happiness. But what is being emphasised here is that as we strive to prevent the lack of external wealth, we must also strive to prevent the lack of internal wealth. As mentioned earlier, internal wealth is a positive frame of mind, a mind imbued with kindness. The means for developing internal wealth is the practice of meditation and this is where meditation comes into the picture. Because meditation is the ultimate means for us to develop internal wealth, we need to practise the techniques and instructions for engaging in meditation.

Meditation is also a tool to safeguard whatever positive attitudes we have already developed such as kindness and concern for others. Developing kindness and a concern for the wellbeing of others is one of the primary causes for our mental happiness. The more we develop the attitude of kindness and concern for others, the more we are contributing to our own wellbeing and happiness. On the contrary, someone who lacks concern and kindness for others will naturally feel that their life is empty. Because whatever they do is based only on a selfish attitude, whenever they try to achieve something, it doesn't seem to bring real meaning in their life and seems purposeless. That is because their actions lack the essential ingredient for their own wellbeing, which is an attitude of benefiting others, of kindness towards others.

Again, the more we develop kindness and concern for others, the happier and more contented we will feel. So kindness is seen as one of the main ingredients for our own happiness.

Those who have reached their early twenties and beyond would have gone through the experience of developing relationships with family, relatives, friends or a partner. When we look at these connections we have had with others, we can conclude that whenever the connection was based on genuine concern and love, we really felt joyful and happy. But when our connection with others was based on a fleeting superficial attraction with no real sense of concern, it would

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have led to miscommunication, agitation and ill-feelings between the two people. Then one would have experienced a lot of sadness, feeling disappointed and hurt. Using the experiences we have had throughout our life, we can conclude that a relationship based on genuine concern, love and the wish to really benefit the other – and in which that love is then returned with a genuine concern for ourselves – such a mutual relationship brings real joy and happiness in our life.

So we can see from our experience that the main ingredient for any good relationship is genuine concern, kindness and love for each other. That is very clear. With the limited capacity we have right now, at least we can accept that such a genuine relationship with others is the basis for a genuinely happy life. We cannot really do much more at the moment to achieve a happy life for ourselves.

We need to consider and contemplate these factors regularly, developing our attitudes through a gradual process. These attitudes cannot just come about by reflecting upon them once or twice. They are something we need to really develop slowly. As we investigate through our own experiences and relate them to the instructions given in the teaching, through this combination of learning and investigating slowly, we can come to really understand the main points for ourselves.

To summarise what we explained earlier, if we engage in a relationship or any other activity only on the basis of self-interest, because of that focus only on oneself, we are blinded to the real factors that bring us happiness. We experience more and more frustration and unease in our mind, and the empty feeling within us becomes greater and greater. However, if we begin to focus on others and generate a sense of goodwill towards them, to that extent we can start to gradually become happier.

A very practical way of applying this is to generate the thought: 'It is pointless to focus only on my wellbeing, engaging in things only with self-interest, when there are so many others who also want to be happy. Focusing only on myself, one person, is really a limited view and very selfish. Rather I must open up and take others' concerns and wellbeing into consideration, and stop to think about how others also need happiness and how I can help others to achieve that'.

If we can start thinking about others in general, that will slowly free us from the focus merely on ourselves and release us from our self-interest. As a result, our mind will gradually become happier and more peaceful. That seems to be the best way to go about it.

Generally, when we start to really familiarise the mind with that attitude of concern for others, this is really the key to happiness and a key to having good relationships with others, as they will naturally take an interest in us and generate concern and love for us. Sometimes people come and ask me whether there is special formula or mantra they can recite to attract others to them and to make others like them. My answer to that is that while there may be some mantras one could recite, the main thing is to develop a kind attitude and a good heart towards others. That will naturally attract others to you and they will genuinely have concern for you. So that is the key – developing a kind attitude within oneself.

Understanding the benefits of meditation will encourage us to engage in the practice of meditation. But while we may feel inspired to engage in the practice of meditation, it is bound to be difficult. We need to recall the main purpose

and great benefits that we will be able to experience after meditating for some time. If we can keep these benefits in sight, even when we do experience some difficulties, we can be patient and endure them. We can understand that, although there are difficulties that will challenge us, we can maintain our patience and endure those difficulties and continue with our practice.

I mention this because the reality is that whatever worthwhile result we may wish to achieve, when we exert some effort to gain that result, there are bound to be difficulties. There are bound to be pros and cons for any activity we engage in. The 'pros' of engaging in meditation are that we will get a great result in the future; the 'cons' would be the difficulties we have to endure. If we are patient and accept that there will be difficulties – but that we will continue anyway – we will not lose our enthusiasm and courage. This is important to keep in mind.

To achieve the great benefits of meditation, such as developing genuine loving kindness in our heart, we must begin first by having a focused mind. This is the key to developing all the good qualities in our mind. Thus the initial meditation we engage in is the meditation of focusing the mind. The reason we need to focus our mind is that the main obstacle to achieving good qualities in our mind is the distracted mind. The more distractions we have in the mind, the harder it is for us to achieve any of the qualities we wish to achieve.

The distractions can also be referred to as the conceptual thoughts – many superstitious or conceptual thoughts constantly bombard our mind. Our mind is constantly moving from one thought to another thought based on worldly objects. Maintaining our focus on a chosen object is the main technique for slowly distancing our mind from the distractions.

Here we use the breath as the focus. As we sit in a comfortable and relaxed upright position, we tune into our breath and maintain our focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. As mentioned in earlier sessions, from the very beginning it is important to have a determination to keep our mind focused just on the breath and not allow the mind to be influenced by other distractions. For the next few minutes we will just focus on our breath and try to maintain that. (*Pause for meditation*)

We could continue with the text unless someone has a question that they would like to address.

*Question: As I try to focus my mind in meditation, there are times when I begin to reflect on the suffering of others, and that seems to become a distraction. However on the other hand contemplating on other's sufferings is considered as a positive thing which can help develop compassion. Can Geshe-la please clarify this point?*

*Answer:* It depends on what meditation you are engaged in at the time. If you were engaged in a meditation on compassion and love towards other beings, contemplating the sufferings of other beings is appropriate. As you mentioned, it becomes a means to develop one's love and compassion towards others.

Now, as we meditate on or contemplate the suffering of others, it may bring some agitation or unease in our own mind. This unease can ultimately be overcome. Because this unease is based on concern, love and compassion for others, it can be transformed into a strong motivation to help others. So rather than contributing to depression, it will encourage us to do something for others. In that sense, the initial unease we experience by contemplating the suffering of

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others can serve a great purpose – it can serve as a means to actually enhance our practice.

If we are doing meditation on love and compassion, it may even be appropriate to contemplate the feeling unease and suffering in one's mind – that's OK. If that feeling of unease from seeing others' suffering is based on love and compassion, it can serve as a means to benefit others. However, if one focuses on others and feels unease but doesn't have real concern and love, that feeling of unease doesn't serve any purpose. In fact, one will just feel uncomfortable, which will not do one any good.

For someone who is inclined to feel concern and love for others, that sense of unease will become a motivation to do something. When we see a family member, a partner or a friend suffering – leaving aside all sentient beings and the grand picture for now – we might initially feel unease because of their discomfort, their suffering. However, that feeling of unease may motivate us to do something to try to end their suffering. So this serves a purpose – to get us to do something for others. You can get a picture of how the initial uncomfortable feeling actually contributes to something positive. But if we lack compassion, we may see the suffering and feel unease or have no feeling of concern or empathy at all – I think the expression in English is feeling cold, having no feeling.

Along with the wish to benefit others comes the sense of personal responsibility; we can feel encouraged to do something to end that other person's suffering. In fact, the feeling of unease in one's mind when one sees others suffering is a good indication that one does have some concern and love for others.

On the other hand, if we didn't have any concern and love for others and we were to completely disagree with someone or consider them as an enemy, if that person were to suffer, rather than feeling unease, we might even start to feel glad about it. When we saw that someone we disliked was suffering, we may actually feel happy and glad, thinking 'They deserve it'. That sort of feeling shows that one completely lacks genuine concern and love for them. If one considers them as an enemy, then one begins to feel glad when they suffer.

In fact, the suffering they are experiencing is an experience that no one wishes to go through, even oneself. No one wants that experience of suffering. If we could extend the same feeling of concern and unease we feel for those close to us towards all beings, even one's enemies, we can develop the genuine wish of wanting to benefit and help them and trying to remove their suffering.

In a relationship, if one partner becomes unwell and is hospitalised, for someone who did not have genuine concern and real love and saw the relationship as being based on a fleeting attraction, they may use this as an excuse or opportunity to go off with someone else. While their partner is sick in hospital, they may not go to visit them and care for them.

On the other hand, for someone who has genuine concern, when their partner fell ill, they would have great concern for the other's wellbeing and would try to help them and benefit them in any way and visit them in hospital. Their concern would become stronger, even increasing during this time.

For a partner who goes off and has a relationship with someone else, it's a clear sign that there was no real concern and love to begin with. Those who did not have real love and concern initially would see the situation of their partner

or friend getting sick as an opportunity to have another relationship.

Because of the importance of having mutually beneficial relationships, I emphasise the point of developing genuine concern and love for each other. That is not to say there is no attachment involved. In an ordinary worldly relationship there is bound to be attachment involved. However, along with the attachment that is there anyway, if one can further develop genuine concern and love for each other, this is what will endure; the attachment will not. If the relationship is based only on attachment, the situation mentioned earlier will occur – people will neglect each other. But if genuine concern and love is developed in addition to the attachment, this would be a key factor in not neglecting each other and it would firmly maintain the relationship.

Any further questions, before we end the session?

*Question: At times when we show a love and concern towards others, they may take advantage of us, how can we deal with that?*

*Answer:* The point you just made is actually true. Because of this, I usually advise people that it is very important to use one's intelligence and wisdom to investigate others' behaviour and qualities, especially in relationships that may lead to a long-term partnership or even marriage. I always tell people not to be hasty.

Especially in a relationship, the initial sexual attraction is very much based on attachment. When the initial attraction is based on attachment, even if there are faults in the other, the attachment blinds one to seeing those faults. In fact, one exaggerates the qualities of the other. The faults themselves could be seen as qualities when there is strong attachment. However, after a certain time in a prolonged relationship, one can begin to see the reality.

So it is important that one takes time and not be hasty. In associating with others generally, we must use our discriminating wisdom. As we develop our intelligence and wisdom, we will be able to slowly determine how much one can open oneself towards others. That is something which comes through one's own wisdom and experience. That is why it is important to not be hasty.

I give this advice especially to young people who are still developing, yet who may have reached a point in being interested in finding a partner. I give this very practical advice, that it is important to not look only at the appearance of the other, because appearances are deceiving. If you are attracted only to the appearance of their face or of their body, that will not really endure. Rather, you should look into what inner qualities they have – their knowledge, their behaviour, their general attitude to life. Looking into these qualities will lead to a more enduring relationship.

From the very start, if one were to look only at appearances, it would be similar to someone who was extremely hungry and would consume anything they came across right away. For a hungry person, as soon as they saw food, they might not really think twice about how old the food is or what it is made of. They might just consume it and experience the ill-effects of food poisoning or whatever. It is the same with starting a relationship.

There was once someone who sought my advice about their life, especially marriage, and then informed me that he had found someone who really seemed to be a perfect match and that he could marry. He went as far as getting engaged, but before he actually got married, this boy started to find out that the other person was becoming more demanding and starting to inflict her ideas upon him, saying 'You have to

change your religion, you have to do this, you've got to do that' and started to impose things on him. He felt she were becoming more and more controlling. He came back to me later and said 'I don't think I can actually marry this person'. From the very start when he came to seek advice I said 'You must be very careful and take time to check'. He seemed to be quite sure in the beginning, saying 'Oh yes, everything is fine, everything is good' but later on, he had to change his mind.

Essentially the Buddhist attitude is that one does not give up genuine concern and love for anyone. However, on a practical level, if you see that the other is becoming too controlling or demanding or taking advantage of you, you can distance oneself from them physically. That decision is in your interest and in your own hand. You have an ability to choose whether you want to be with someone or not, and have a close association on a physical level.

However, by all means, you must not give up your concern and love for others. That is something we should all try to maintain. Developing love and compassion, as I mentioned earlier, is the means to benefit and help others but it should not be a means for others to have control over you. Love and compassion is not explained [in the teachings] as allowing others to control you.

If you have genuine love and concern for others, it will be natural for them to be influenced by your good intentions for them. Even in a worldly sense, we will be able to influence or control others if we have real love and concern; they would allow themselves to be influenced by you because they know of your genuine concern for them. We can see even with pets such as dogs and cats, they are willingly obedient to the master because the master is kind to them, feeds them and is nice to them. When the master says 'sit' they will sit and when he says 'go out' they go out. Training them can be easy if one shows genuine concern for them.

*Question: It seems that a Bodhisattva's practice involves helping those who have the most difficulties?*

*Answer:* Actually that is very true. Even in a worldly sense, we find that those who are deprived and impoverished and who are in the most difficult circumstances are the ones who are helped first. Even the government sees it as a priority to help those who are impoverished and who are not doing so well. In relation to the Australian government, we can see that the social benefits and so forth are focused very much on helping those who are really in need. We can find that this true in every religion – they preach helping those who are most in need. Of course, it is very true that when we have the capacity to help, we should focus on those who are in the most need, who have the most problems.

*Question: How does one deal with a situation where someone is controlling?*

*Answer:* Words themselves can be quite misleading, because the word 'control' can be used in a positive sense and in a negative sense.

When we talk about control in a negative sense, it is along the lines of the examples you have mentioned. When the control is based only on self-interest, it is not accepted by anyone; they reject and resist it. The more someone tries to control someone else out of own self-interest, as soon as the other senses that motivation, they have a strong resistance.

However, when we talk about controlling or influencing others through love and compassion, it is not based on self-interest; it is based entirely on others' interests. When we use

the word 'control' in the context of genuine love and compassion for others, because of the genuine concern for others that is being exhibited in practice, others will be naturally drawn towards us. So even if there is no intention to control them, they naturally come towards us and allow themselves to be influenced by a person who has great concern and love for them.

Controlling others out of love and compassion does not mean becoming a dictator and ordering people around. Rather because of the genuine love and concern, others naturally feel drawn towards such a person and naturally trust them and allow themselves to be influenced in a positive way.

What you do for others out of genuine love and compassion for them would only be of benefit to them, because there is no self-interest or ulterior motive involved. Thus one tries to use one's wisdom in seeing the difference between the different types of control.

If someone were to lay down the rules of what you should do and not do, you would not willingly follow those rules. That sort of control would not be willingly accepted by others. However, when there is genuine love and concern for others and rules are not laid down out of self-interest but in the interest of others, when those others genuinely sense that motivation, they will naturally be drawn towards such a person.

Even in a normal social setting, the father in a family, for example, may not exert any control over the children. If the children are doing fine that's OK, because there is no control issue there and the children are doing fine. But there may be instances where the father might exert some control over the children, knowing that the children might go astray and it will be in the children's interest that he does this so that they can maintain themselves. Here, even though it may appear that the father is controlling and may even seem to be doing it out of his own interest, because he is concerned for his children, he may decide to exert that control. In such circumstances, control is necessary if it is for the interest and benefit for others. Even though it might not be accepted right away, the children would see the benefit later on.

The questions were all very good and very relevant. Thank you very much for sharing those nice questions. These are questions that I was able to answer quite easily, which also seems to help others who are listening to the answers.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will take a few moments again to engage in some meditation. What we should take away from this evening is that we should try to be more concerned about controlling our own mind rather than controlling others. That is much more relevant and much more practical. So we will spend a few minutes focusing on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni sitting in a relaxed posture.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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